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Foix, except the anecdote of Pippin the Short, and that Brantôme's version must, therefore, be considered as the direct source of the German poet. There is no need for such a theory, since the account of Brantôme, somewhat abridged, is found in Saint-Foix's *Essais historiques sur Paris*.²²

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THE SOCIAL SATIRES OF THOMAS LOVE PEACOCK

PART II

Peacock stands aloof from all political alignment. Condemning as he did the society of his day, he obviously could have been neither a conservative Tory nor even a moderate Whig. One might, therefore, suppose him a radical, like his friend Shelley; but the facts contradict such a hypothesis. In 1819, when his career as a satirist was just under way, he accepted a post in the India House. In the first place, if he were a radical, he could scarcely have taken a semi-government position without all his radical friends making at least private remonstrance against this apostasy—especially as they made such an ado over the “apostasy” of Southey and Wordsworth. In the case of Peacock, nothing of the sort happened; Shelley, in fact, writes congratulating him on being so well provided for (Ingpen, pp. 697 and 710). Had Peacock ever been a radical, Shelley certainly could not have voiced such sentiments. In the second place, Peacock, at this time and afterwards, continues to attack the “lakers” for their apostasy—a thing he would scarcely have had the face to do, had he but lately played apostasy in exactly the same fashion to exactly the same cause. Peacock, then, had never been a radical, and indeed never became one. He represents them in a light at once antipathetic and ludicrous: insincere faddists, they all cry each his own panacea, recommending to society a nostrum whose efficacy the vendor himself has never tested. Then finally came the Reform Bill of 1832, which Peacock considered bootless, a fitting summary to his opinion of reforms and reformers. In short, after looking about him and seeing society corrupt, he turned his eyes to the intellectual life that was moulding the

²² *Œuvres complètes de M. de Saint-Foix*, Paris, Duchesne, 1778, III, 183 ff

future, and saw that also corrupt: such is the social pessimism of Thomas Love Peacock.

In the first place, the motives Peacock assigns to reformers are low. Shelley, he seems to have looked upon as an impractical dreamer; at least, so Shelley himself interpreted Peacock's burlesque of him as Scythrop (Ingpen, p. 694), and Shelley's interpretation seems accurate; but Peacock credits reformers, in general, with no idealism, however impractical. As sentimentalists, as chasers after novelty, as bilious malcontents, thus Peacock sees the reformers of society. The failure of the French Revolution, which had turned the "lakers" into conservatives, embittered many radicals of the succeeding generation; and this bitterness manifested itself emotionally in the *Weltschmerz*, a point of view with which Peacock's keen, intellectual pessimism had little in common, and of which he had a very poor opinion: Mr. Hilary, whom Peacock draws as the most common-sense character in *Nightmare Abbey*, explains the *Weltschmerz* as "frequently the offspring of overweening and mortified vanity, quarreling with the world for not being better treated than it deserves" (p. 188). Mr. Flosky, a caricature of Coleridge, explains that the "blue devils" dominate contemporary literature because "tea has shattered our nerves and late dinners make us the slaves of indigestion" (p. 173 et seq.). Mr. Listless, moreover, finds that "this delightful north-east wind . . . delicious misanthropy and discontent that demonstrates the nullity of virtue and energy" (p. 164) puts him in a very good humor with himself and his sofa. In short, whether the cause of the pessimistic unrest be late dinners and tea or wounded vanity, it all comes to one conclusion: Peacock considered these men actuated by only private motives, not by any high idealism based in a comprehensive understanding of social wrongs. Mr. Flosky sums up *Nightmare Abbey* (p. 210) with an admirable satiric touch: "Let society only give fair play at one and the same time, as I flatter myself it is inclined to do, to your system of morals, and my system of metaphysics, and Scythrop's system of politics, and Mr. Listless's system of manners and Mr. Toobad's system of religion, and the result will be as fine a mental chaos as even the immortal Kant himself could ever have hoped to see; in the prospect of which I rejoice."

For reformers so actuated to be sincere is a psychological contradiction; thus, Peacock is perfectly consistent in preferring this

charge to their motives and incompetency to the resultant efforts. In *Headlong Hall*, each avowed deteriorationist refuses to apply the theory to his own particular specialty (pp. 87-88). Mr. Escot, the champion of vegetarianism, while defending his attitude, begs the dinner-guests not to launch into the question of final causes—and meanwhile helps himself to a slice of beef (pp. 18-19). Poor Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey afford shining targets for every satire up to *Gryll Grange*; and Peacock in *Nightmare Abbey* (p. 237) cast a jocose reflection upon even Scythrop's (Shelley's) sincerity: he plans to "make his exit like Werther," calls for "a pint of port and a pistol" for dinner—and ends by drinking the port.

Finally, in 1830, when the Whigs on a reform platform, carried a majority in Parliament, Peacock had a chance of testing his low opinion of their sincerity. The ten years that intervened between this and *Nightmare Abbey* and *Headlong Hall* had not lessened his skepticism; for, in *Crotchet Castle*, written in 1830 and published the following year, the Rev. Dr. Folliott thus characterizes the new ministry in the person of "my learned friend" Lord Brougham who had just been made Lord Chancellor: "He will make a speech of seven hours duration; and this will be its quintessence: that, seeing the exceeding difficulty of putting salt on the bird's tail, it will be expedient to consider the best method of throwing dust in the bird's eyes" (p. 304), the bird being the liberal constituencies of England. In short, he believed that the reformers in power would prove just as conservative as the Tories. In the same novel, he even turns upon reform itself as a means of medicining the nation's deep-seated ailments: the three charity commissioners who sit and discuss for ever and ever without doing anything are surely meant to point the social paralysis of the state to achieve any adequate reform. When in 1832, the Reform Bill, timid as it was, was finally forced through Parliament, Peacock seems to have been no better pleased. The old abuses have merely taken on new names; the old insincerity has, like a spring, merely gushed out at a new place. In 1837, five years after the passage of the Bill, he pens a preface to a fresh edition of his novels: "*Headlong Hall* begins with the Holyhead Mail, and *Crotchet Castle* ends with a rotten borough," he writes. "The Holyhead Mail no longer stops at Capel Cerig Inn, which the progress of improvement has thrown out of the road; and the rotten boroughs of 1830 have ceased to

exist, though there are some very pretty pocket properties which are their worthy successors. But the classes of tastes, feelings, and opinions, which were successively brought into play in these little tales, remain substantially the same. Perfectibilians, deteriorationists, statu-quo-ites, phrenologists, transcendentalists, political economists, theorists in all sciences, projectors in all arts, morbid visionaries, romantic enthusiasts, lovers of music, lovers of the picturesque, and lovers of good dinners, march, and will march forever, *pari passu* with the march of mechanics, which some facetiously call the march of intellect. . . . The array of false pretensions, moral, political, and literary, is as imposing as ever." Peacock believed that the Reform Bill accomplished nothing; and, in his last novel, *Gryll Grange* (p. 3), published in 1860 when Peacock was a full blown reactionary, he still renews this charge of insincerity: "In my little experience, I have found . . . that men who sell their votes to the highest bidder and want only 'the protection of the ballot' to sell the promise of them to both parties, are a free and independent constituency; that a man who successively betrays everybody that trusts him, and abandons every principle he ever professed, is a great statesman, and a conservative, forsooth *a nil conservando*, etc."

Peacock hoped nothing from reformers either in office or out: the fundamental failings of human character that lay behind the rottenness of family, church and state, permeated likewise even the medicines that should have cured them. Like Helvetius, his conception of human nature was pessimistic; but, unlike the latter, he knew enough to realize that a mere change of political and social institutions could not effect a millennium, that the fault is inherent in man himself. Shelley recognized this when he wrote addressing Peacock: "you who assert the supremacy of Ahriman," the Persian god of evil. The failure of the French Revolution to reform man by changing the state and society, had taught succeeding thinkers that evil is deeper than these; and Peacock sharing as he does the rationalizing outlook of the preceding age, stands an eighteenth century man, pre-natally disillusioned by the failure of eighteenth century philosophy. Unlike his contemporaries who took refuge in the sentimental *Weltschmerz* which they expressed in the lyric cry that characterized the literature of the age, Peacock turned skeptic, and sharpened his arrows to shoot folly as it flew.

Although Peacock's thought is primarily rationalistic, he borrows

his explanation as to how this wretched situation came about, largely from Rousseau. Mr. Forester in *Melincourt*, for whom Peacock seems to have a special preference, describes this racial degeneration: "Civilization, vice and folly, grow old together. Corruption begins among the higher orders, and from them descends to the people; so that in every nation the ancient nobility is the first to exhibit symptoms of corporeal and mental degeneracy" (p. 97), the stature of the human race, we are told, has decreased (p. 269); and "Commercial prosperity is a golden surface, but all beneath it is rags and wretchedness," to which last is added the quotation from Rousseau: "Man has fallen never to rise again" (p. 128). Mr. Forester becomes the *pater familias* to an ideal, Rousseauistic commonwealth on his estate. But however much Peacock may sympathize with this scheme, he evidently realizes the impossibility of its universal application; for he makes Mr. Fax point out that it is "adapted only to a small community and to the infancy of human society" (p. 301), and Sir Telegraph, upon being belabored by Forester to give up the noxious and unnatural habit of carriage-driving, replies: "When ecclesiastical dignitaries imitate the temperance and humility of the founder of that religion by which they feed and flourish: when the man in place acts on the principles which he professed while he was out: when borough electors will not sell their suffrage; nor representatives their votes: when poets are not to be hired for the maintenance of any opinion: when learned divines can afford to have a conscience: when universities are not a hundred years in knowledge behind all the rest of the world: when young ladies speak as they think, and when those who shudder at a tale of the horrors of slavery will deprive their own palates of a sweet taste, for the purpose of contributing all in their power to its extinction:—why then, Forester, I will lay down my barouche" (p. 194). In short, Peacock thought society too complicated, and men too insincere, to make a return to the Golden Age possible. This, however, did not keep him from an occasional ecstasy upon Nature in *Maid Marian*, nor from bitter satire of the advance of the arts and sciences in the masque that concludes *Gryll Grange*. Happiness, truth, and sincerity could come, then, only in a primitive society, for the return of which, Peacock had no hope.

Society was rotten to the core, family, church, and state; reformers were actuated by low motives, were insincere and incom-

petent; society was grown too unwieldy and too corrupt for a return to the days of happiness and truth: so does Peacock affirm the intellectual pessimism and social bankruptcy of an age struggling—vainly it seemed—to solve its acute economic, political, and social problems. He illumines the shadow-land between the Romantic and the Victorian high-lights; and, indeed, the roots of his thought reach back into the eighteenth century; whereas his final novel discusses the progress of science so lately displayed in the industrialism that shocked Ruskin and the biological materialism that alarmed Matthew Arnold. He is an invaluable register of the thought of this transition, a period which few of the Romantic poets lived long enough to experience, but which Peacock has summarized in a series of delightful, penetrating satires. Some such conclusion must have moved Saintsbury in the last of his introductions, thus to define the place of Peacock: "The English Muse seems to have set, at the joining of the old and new ages, this one person with the learning and tastes of the ancestors, with the irreverent criticism of the moderns, to comment on the transition; and, having fashioned him, to have broken the mould."¹

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FRANCIS BACON'S KNOWLEDGE OF LAW-FRENCH

It seems not to be as well known as it should be that among his many and various accomplishments Francis Bacon included an unusual command of Law-French. What I am concerned to demonstrate is not merely an ability to read Law-French—any black-letter lawyer would declare that a man who had been Treas-

¹ List of works used:

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